



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE RETURNS \$10,000 TO 83-YEAR-OLD SCAM VICTIM** *Victim had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars to con artists from Canada*

ONALASKA, Wis. — Special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) returned \$10,000 to an elderly Wisconsin woman last week who for the second time had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars of her life savings to telemarketing con artists operating from Canada.

This returned \$10,000 of the victim's money — only a portion of her actual loss — was recovered by Project COLT, a multi-agency joint initiative targeting telemarketing fraud including: ICE, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the FBI, and the U.S. Postal Service Inspection Service.

The 83-year-old victim was initially contacted by telemarketer con artists who claimed to be attorneys and/or government officials. They convinced her that she had won the Canadian lottery. The con artists then instructed the victim to send them money to cover the insurance and taxes on the lottery winnings before her money could be released. ICE agents believe the victim had sent more than \$200,000 via cashiers checks, Western Union, Money Gram or standard mail to the telemarketing con artists. ICE agents in August had previously returned an additional \$18,000 check to the victim that was intercepted in Toronto following the same scam.

Brian Falvey, resident agent-in-charge for the ICE Milwaukee office, warns Wisconsin residents to be vigilant about such scams, which have already bilked people — especially senior citizens — in the United States out of tens of millions of dollars.

“There's no such thing as free money,” said Falvey. “This victim received only a small portion returned of the hundreds of thousands of dollars she sent to these criminals. These sophisticated and convincing con artists appear trustworthy to their elderly victims who aren't used to such deceitful tactics.”

In a separate Illinois case, ICE agents in July 2004 recovered and returned \$12,200 to an elderly Barrington man who was bilked out of more than \$250,000 over a two-year period in a similar version of the long-running telemarketing scam.

Telemarketing fraud, which primarily targets elderly victims in the United States, has resulted in the loss of tens of millions of dollars by people who are least able to recover from financial loss. Victims often lose their entire life savings. Fraudulent telemarketers represent themselves to victims as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

The focus of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. Project COLT consists of law enforcement officers who intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can be recovered and ultimately returned to victims. These officers also work to prevent further victimization both through public education, and by prosecuting those who commit fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

To report suspicious telemarketing activity, members of the public can contact Project COLT's hotline at 888-495-8501. More information about Project COLT and the Top 10 Telemarketing Scams are available on the ICE website at: [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov).

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*